



Frequently Asked Questions and Answers on the Buckhead City Issue

What's behind the effort to create a new city that is separate from Atlanta?

Violent crime in Buckhead, as well as across the city, is impacting residents and businesses alike. City services, such as reliable trash pick-up and maintenance of streets and sidewalks, have deteriorated markedly during the pandemic. And zoning proposals that may harm neighborhoods have recently been put forward. These issues must be addressed. However, the best and most immediate way to do so is by giving our new Mayor an opportunity to implement his actionable plan to remedy the issues facing Buckhead and the rest of the City.

In contrast, the group pushing cityhood believes that Buckhead should seek to divide the existing city by trying to convince the Georgia legislature and residents of Buckhead that it should be allowed to secede from Atlanta. As set forth below, this path is fraught with uncertainty and will not fix the crime problem and other issues facing our community.

What's the process to create a new city?

The process to create a new city is lengthy and complicated – especially if it involves also carving up an existing city. Two separate bills must be introduced – one to de annex or secede from the existing city and the other to create the new city. A de-annexation bill historically has been what is called “local legislation” and requires the support of the local legislative delegation from the city and/or county impacted. The cityhood bill requires a feasibility study to determine if cityhood is viable.

The following are a few of the issues the General Assembly will have to consider:

Public Finances and Taxes

Cities in Georgia are creations of the State so the legislature will need to consider not only the viability of the new city but also the one left behind. The impact on the City of Atlanta's finances would be devastating, including its ability to satisfy nearly \$3 billion of existing liabilities and unfunded pension obligations. The annual net fiscal loss to the City of Atlanta would range from \$80 million to \$116 million, and the loss of the city's strong bond rating would impair its ability to fund infrastructure and city services in the future.

As the AJC has [reported](#), the city gets most of its revenue from property taxes paid by homeowners and commercial property owners. About 45% of that comes from Buckhead. Removing that tax base cannot be accomplished without a long-lasting, damaging impact on the capital city of the State of Georgia.



Furthermore, the impact on bond rating will not be limited to the City of Atlanta and a new Buckhead City. Creating an easier path to carve up cities and permit wealthy areas to de annex will destabilize the bond market and lead to a downgrading of city bonds across the state. It likely will impact the state's coveted AAA bond rating as well.

Business Reputation of the State

Even talk of Buckhead seceding from Atlanta is costly – not only to Atlanta's business reputation but also to the state as a whole. CEOs and business leaders are strongly opposed to cityhood efforts, not just because there is little chance of success, but also because the divisions stoked by the process would be harmful. Companies and entrepreneurs value stability when investing in or relocating to a community and state. Talk of cleaving the city in two, and its monumental repercussions, will likely cause hesitation for future investment not only in Atlanta proper but also in the metro region and the state as a whole.

After considering these issues, if the de-annexation bill gets the support of the local delegation and the House and Senate determine that both bills should pass, the bills go to the governor for his consideration to sign or veto. If that is completed, a referendum is placed on the ballot, allowing only voters in the selected area of Buckhead to choose whether they would like their community to form a new city. The voters in other parts of Atlanta – including those parts of Buckhead the cityhood advocates choose to exclude - would not get to participate in the referendum.

If Buckhead were to secede from the City of Atlanta, what are the dangers for the remaining residents of Atlanta?

- The annual net fiscal loss to the City of Atlanta would range from **\$80 million to \$116 million**.
- For APS, the school district would be substantially depleted, with an estimated **\$232 million** loss annually.
- Issues regarding service of current debt and future debt, economic development disunity, substantial startup cost, the future of city parks, water and sewer costs, and reduced community services are all likely to be significant difficulties for the City of Atlanta, APS, and the remaining Buckhead area if a de-annexation were to move forward. **Each would stand to lose financially, economically, and socially.**

Because both Buckhead and Atlanta would be weaker entities if separated, economic development initiatives will likely suffer. Business prospects value stability when investing in or relocating to a community and state. The myriad uncertainties and monumental repercussions of splitting the city



will likely cause hesitation for future investment and jeopardize the tremendous economic momentum we enjoy as a city, a region and as a state.

How would separation from the City of Atlanta affect Buckhead residents?

Higher Taxes

Buckhead area residents would likely pay higher tax rates due to the need to refinance debt assumed for existing infrastructure and start-up spending and due to the loss of combined financial resources. They will also have to pay higher water and sewer rates by as much as 20%, similar to what other Atlanta non-residents have to pay. Further, they will have to purchase parks and green space from Atlanta.

Economic Development

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Public Education

Additionally, if de-annexation was to occur, Buckhead students' public education would be in limbo. APS owns all public schools in the Buckhead area, and the Georgia constitution prohibits the creation of a new Buckhead City school district. Buckhead City students would be out-of-district for APS and only able to attend based on availability. They would/may also have to pay tuition, assuming there was availability, which is questionable given the significant financial hit a new Buckhead City would inflict on APS. Nor could the Buckhead cityhood advocates simply contract with APS for the education of Buckhead children because the Georgia constitution only authorizes boards of education to contract with one another.

How would separation from the City of Atlanta affect Buckhead crime and its prosecution?

The spike in crime is a serious concern in Buckhead, across the City of Atlanta as well as in communities across the state. [Violent crime is up in surrounding suburbs, including recently created cities like Sandy Springs, Brookhaven, and Dunwoody. Communities further out from Atlanta such as Gwinnett, Cherokee, Douglas, and Paulding Counties are all reporting rising murder and rape cases.](#)

Setting up a new city limits sign at Peachtree Creek will not reduce crime in Buckhead. Nor would hiring 250 new Buckhead City police officers. Why? Because arrests involving felonies and



misdemeanors made in Buckhead City would continue to be prosecuted in the notoriously backlogged Fulton County courts by an [overwhelmed and under-resourced](#) district attorney's office. The foundation of Fulton's de facto "revolving door" policy for repeat offenders would not change.

["\[De-annexation\] wouldn't make any difference, none."](#) District Attorney Fani Willis told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "They'll all end up here. We work cases everywhere from Milton to Palmetto. It's 15 cities now. It'll just be 16."

So if Buckhead City is not the answer, what can be done and what is being done?

Leadership matters, and we have a new Mayor who is already taking action to address the concerns of Buckhead residents and the rest of Atlanta. We need to give him an opportunity to make good on his campaign promises and implement his plan to tackle crime, inadequate city service delivery, and other issues of concern. We also have a new City Council, including a new City Council President who has a history of working collaboratively with our Mayor. These newly elected leaders have been visiting with our community and have made it clear they're listening to and will address our concerns. Let's give them a chance to do so.

On public safety, there has been significant recent investment to support our law enforcement officers and reduce the strain on overburdened judicial systems, including the new public safety training center for the Atlanta Police Department, the \$5 million Fulton County appropriated to the Fulton District Attorney's Office to prosecute violent cases, and the \$110 million Governor Kemp dedicated to combat violent crime and work through judicial case backlogs throughout the state. Further, the metro Atlanta business community has forged a [public-private partnership with Fulton County to resolve the backlog of unentered criminal charge dispositions in the Fulton County judicial system](#), which will help ensure judges have complete and accurate criminal history information when making critical bail and sentencing decisions.

Atlanta is known for coming together to address its challenges, and that is exactly what we must do now to improve public safety and other issues with real, impactful solutions.